

clique who had mismanaged the affairs of the nation without regard to the interest of the few or the many, of the high or the low. It may be well to pause here and examine who were the parties concerned in the most famous of mediaeval Parliaments.

The protagonists of the scene that was opening were the members of the House of Commons. Thirty-seven counties of England sent up two members each, and about one hundred cities and towns enjoyed the same privilege. But because there were two hundred borough-members and only seventy-four knights of the shires, it did not follow that the will of the former preponderated in the assembly. The necessity of proportional representation never occurred to the makers of the English Parliamentary system, and it was only in the days of the Stuarts, when decisions came to lie with the actual majority, that the numerical weakness of the country members became a real grievance. In unsophisticated early times, when power went rather by the handling of sword-hilts than by the counting of heads, the knights stood for more in the political world than the peaceful burghers. The towns of England, though important and respected, were not the armed and aggressive communes of France, or the free cities of the Empire. Few would have been willing to fight for any political object except their own privileges and commerce, as they showed in the Wars of the Roses. The towns were not only less military, but less rich in men and resources than the country. The population of rural England was still several times as great as that of all the towns together. It is not therefore surprising to find that for all purely political purposes the seventy-four knights of the shire were the real House of Commons.\* The borough members sent up petitions which influenced the economic policy of the Government in questions of finance, commerce and taxation, and in all matters which directly concerned the towns; but they considered State affairs as outside their province. The overturning and setting up of ministries, the battles with the Court or the Lords, were almost entirely the work of the county representatives. The chroniclers of the time, when describing any political move of the Lower House,